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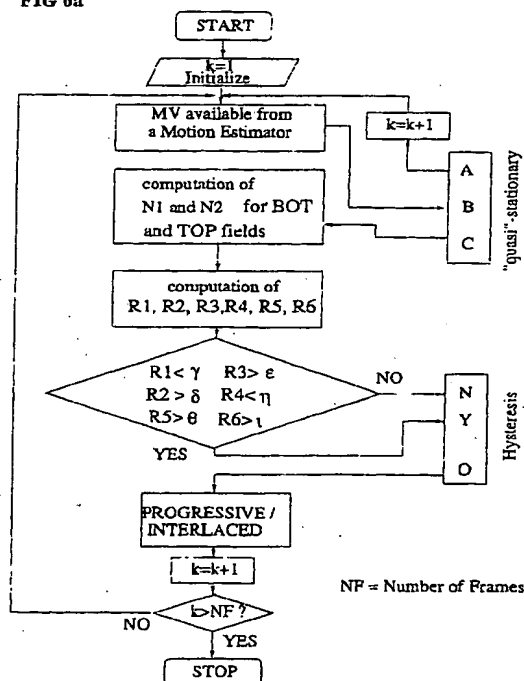
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(54) **Method of processing motion vectors histograms to detect interleaved or progressive picture structures**

(57) A method of processing a bitstream of coded data of video sequences of progressive or interlaced pictures divisible in a top half-frame and in a bottom half-frame that comprises estimating motion vectors of groups of pixels belonging to said top half-frame of the current picture in relation to pixels belonging to the bottom half-frame of the preceding picture ($MV_{TOP_{X,Y}}(K)$) and motion vectors of group of pixels of said bottom half-frame of the current picture in relation to pixels belonging to the top half-frame of the current picture ($MV_{BOT_{X,Y}}(K)$), respectively, characterized in that it comprises calculating for each macroblock of said top half-frame and a bottom half-frame a respective top motion coefficient ($V_{TOP_{X,Y}}(K)$) and a bottom motion coefficient ($V_{BOT_{X,Y}}(K)$), depending on the estimation of the motion vectors of top half-frame ($MV_{TOP_{X,Y}}(K)$) and bottom half-frame ($MV_{BOT_{X,Y}}(K)$); recognizing the current picture as an interlaced picture by a substantial equality of the distributions of values of said motion coefficients ($V_{TOP_{X,Y}}(K)$, $V_{BOT_{X,Y}}(K)$) or as a progressive picture by a substantial inequality of the distributions of values of said motion coefficients ($V_{TOP_{X,Y}}(K)$, $V_{BOT_{X,Y}}(K)$).

FIG 6a



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DescriptionFIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 [0001] The present invention generally relates to methods for processing digital video pictures and in particular a method for detecting properties of a sequence of digital pictures.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 [0002] The increasing requirements of TV sets, in terms of quality of the displayed images, and of transmitting devices, in terms of amplitude of the frequency bands used during transmission, have made the techniques for transmitting video sequences of crucial importance.

[0003] Use of digital transceiving systems has made possible to split a frame of a picture in a matrix of numerical values representing the intensities of the video components of each pixel of a frame, allowing processing of the picture by computers.

[0004] The possibility of treating a picture as a matrix of numbers, and so as a bitstream, offers the possibility of coding pictures to facilitate transmission and improve the quality of displayed images.

[0005] Systems for coding video digital sequences are based on the recognition of several properties of pictures. Among such properties, a particular importance have the detection of the character progressive or interlaced of the pictures and the detection of the motion of the objects.

[0006] When these properties are known, it is possible to compress the picture making most efficient their transmission, in terms of used frequency band, and most satisfactory, in terms of quality of their display.

[0007] Several techniques of motion estimation and detection of the progressive or interlaced content (IPD: *Interlaced Progressive Detection*) of digital video sequences are known in literature.

25 [0008] Such techniques are disclosed in US patent No. 5,734,420, WO 99/20040 and in EP-A-0917363, EP-A-0944245, EP-A-0979011, EP99830545.2, EP98830689.0 in the name of the same applicant.

[0009] The methods disclosed in the above mentioned documents operate on the bit values representing the video components of single pixels, so requiring a computational complexity that makes them inappropriate for low cost applications.

30 [0010] In fact a frame, according to the PAL standard, is composed of $720 \times 288 = 207360$ pixels. Methods operating on each pixel are rather burdensome or impose simplifications that reduce the quality of the displayed picture in a more or less sensible manner.

[0011] Methods of elaborating a bitstream of video digital sequences, operating on groups of pixels (macroblocks) in order to reduce the computation complexity are generally used for low cost applications.

35 [0012] More precisely, need is felt for a method of elaborating data of digital video sequences that while operating on groups of pixels:

- permits recognition of the processed picture as progressive or interlaced picture with a reduced number of calculations;
- 40 • reduces the amount of calculations motion estimation, though preserving quality and efficiency of the compression; or
- for the same compression efficiency and amount of calculations during the motion estimation, enhances the quality of displayed pictures.

45 OBJECT AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0013] It has been found and is the object of the present application a processing method usable with MPEG standard coded video sequences, requiring the performance of calculations only on motion vectors. Given that motion vectors can be defined even for a macroblock, instead of being defined for each single pixel, a great computational simplification may be achieved.

50 [0014] The method of the invention allows the detection of the progressive or interlaced content of a picture for improving the effectiveness of the coding of video sequences and the effectiveness of the filtering that is made on the chrominance component of pictures input the coder. The method allows for an enhanced precision in the calculation of motion vectors by virtue of a pre-recognition of the processed picture as a progressive or interlaced picture.

55 [0015] Object of the invention is a method of processing a bitstream of coded data of video sequences of progressive or interlaced pictures, divisible in a top half-frame and in a bottom half-frame, that comprises estimating motion vectors of groups of pixels belonging to the top half-frame of the current picture in relation to pixels belonging to the bottom half-frame of the preceding picture and motion vectors of groups of pixels of the bottom half-frame of the current picture

in relation pixels belonging to the top half-frame of the current picture.

[0016] Starting from such estimations, respective top and a bottom motion coefficients depending on the estimation of the motion vectors of the top and bottom half-frame are calculated for each macroblock of the top half-frame and bottom half-frame, the current picture is recognized as a progressive or an interlaced picture in function of the calculated top and bottom motion coefficients. A substantial equality of the distributions of values of motion coefficients pointing to an interlaced content by contrast, a substantial inequality of the distribution of values of said coefficients pointing to a progressive content.

[0017] The recognition can be done by calculating a pair of shape coefficients representing the distributions of the top and bottom motion coefficients, recognizing the current picture as progressive or as interlaced depending on whether the shape coefficients differ by a quantity greater or lower than a certain value.

[0018] According to an alternative embodiment, it is possible to distinguish progressive pictures by from interlaced pictures calculating a coefficient representing the stochastic correlation between the distribution of the top and bottom motion coefficients, and recognizing the current picture as an interlaced picture or as a progressive picture depending on whether the calculated coefficient exceeds a certain value or not.

[0019] Preferably recognition is established by:

comparing the top and bottom coefficients with a pre-established top threshold and a bottom threshold, respectively;

counting the number of motion vectors whose motion coefficients are lower than the top threshold of the top and the bottom frame of the current picture, producing a pair of respective coefficients;

counting the number of motion vectors whose motion coefficients are greater than the bottom threshold of the top and bottom half-frame of the current picture, producing a second pair of respective coefficients;

recognizing the current picture as a progressive or interlaced picture depending on the four coefficients relative to the current picture and to preceding pictures.

[0020] The method of the invention may also comprise the following further steps:

for each picture, calculating a temporary weight value as a function of the result of the recognition of the picture as a progressive or interlaced picture carried out according to the above mentioned method;

calculating a final weight value as a function of the temporary weight value relative to the picture and of the final weight values relative to preceding pictures;

recognizing a current picture as a progressive or an interlaced picture depending on its temporary weight value and on the final weight values relative to preceding pictures.

[0021] These methods may be implemented even to get a refined calculation of the motion vectors of a picture of a video sequence by a Frame-Prediction technique if the current picture is recognized as a progressive picture or by a Field-Prediction technique if the current picture is recognized as an interlaced picture.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0022] The different aspects and advantages of the invention will result even more evident through the description of several embodiments of the invention and by referring to the attached drawings, wherein:

Figure 1 is an example of a video sequence taken with a progressive camera;

Figure 2 is an example of a video sequence taken with an interlaced camera;

Figure 3 is an example of a possible distribution of the motion coefficients of the motion vectors of a top half-frame (top field) and of a bottom half-frame (bottom field) of a progressive sequence;

Figure 4 is an example of a possible distribution of the motion coefficients of motion vectors of a top half-frame (top field) and of a bottom half-frame (bottom field) of an interlaced sequence;

Figure 5 is a block diagram for executing an algorithm that calculates comparisons coefficients;

Figure 6a is the flow chart of the IPD procedure of the invention;

Figure 6b is a detailed flowchart of the functional block "Hysteresis" of Fig. 6a;

Figure 6c is a flowchart of the functional block "Quasi-stationary" of Fig. 6a;

Figure 7 is the scheme of detection of the progressive or interlaced content of pictures;

Figure 8 is a block diagram of a generic two step motion estimator employing the IPD step of the invention.

DESCRIPTION OF SEVERAL EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

[0023] The method of the invention allows the recognition of pictures of digital video sequences as interlaced or progressive pictures irrespectively of the standards used for coding, exclusively depending on previously performed estimations of motion vectors relative to groups of pixels. The method can be exploited to improve the calculation of motion vectors in terms of augmented precision and/or in terms of reduced computational complexity.

[0024] The fundamental approach of the present invention consists in that by always carrying out motion estimation through a comparison of parameters of consecutive half-frames¹ it is possible to verify whether the pictures to code are interlaced or progressive.

[0025] In fact, in case of a progressive sequence, if the motion estimation is carried out on the bottom field with reference to the top field belonging to the same frame, the modulus of the resulting motion vectors will tend to zero. This happens because the two fields have been sampled by a progressive camera at the same time instant (in fact they belong to the same frame), and not at an interval of 1/50 (or of 1/60) of a second, as in the case of an interlaced PAL (or NTSC) camera.

[0026] Moreover, it is very probable that the vertical component of motion vectors be comprised between -1 and 1, because of the vertical difference of a line between fields of different parity, while the horizontal component be practically zero. It is always possible that zones with an elevated vertical detail (spatial frequencies) deceive the estimator by having it estimating a non-existent vertical motion. However, it is supposed to have a robust motion estimator not affected by this problem.

[0027] By contrast, motion estimation between the top field of frame k and the previous bottom field of the frame $k-1$, will detect an effective motion not only in an interlaced sequence but also in an eventual progressive sequence, given that the two fields are sampled at different instants (and in fact they belong to different frames).

[0028] Figures 1 and 2 illustrate this concept: in particular Fig. 1 shows the motion of a ball taken by a progressive camera, and Fig. 2 the same scene taken by an interlaced camera. As can be seen, while from a field to the successive of the sequence of Fig. 2 the motion vectors MV are always different from zero, this is not true for the motion vectors of the sequence of Fig. 1. In fact, the motion vectors MV from a bottom field to a top field of the same frame k or $k+1$ are always zero, while the motion vectors MV from a top field belonging to the frame $k+1$ to the bottom field belonging to the frame k are always different from zero.

[0029] The criterion of the invention for distinguishing in a very easy manner interlaced pictures from progressive pictures is based on such a peculiarity.

[0030] Let us indicate as $MV_{TOPX,Y}(K)$ the motion vectors of the k -th top half-frame with respect to the $(k-1)$ -th bottom half-frame and $MV_{BOTX,Y}(K)$ the motion vectors of the k -th bottom half-frame with respect to the k -th top half-frame, where k is the frame number. Such motion vectors $MV = (V_x, V_y)$ may be relative to single pixels or to groups of pixels (macroblocks) of the k -th picture, belonging to the top half-frame or the bottom half-frame, respectively.

[0031] In order to implement the method of the invention it is necessary to get, by estimating, even coarsely, the motion vectors $MV_{TOPX,Y}(K)$ and $MV_{BOTX,Y}(K)$, as many respective motion coefficients $V_{TOPX,Y}(K)$ and $V_{BOTX,Y}(K)$ and to recognize the current picture as a progressive or interlaced picture depending on such coefficients.

[0032] A preferred way of calculating the motion coefficients $V_{TOPX,Y}(K)$ and $V_{BOTX,Y}(K)$ is to calculate for each motion vector MV the sum of the absolute value of its components, i.e. to make

$$V_{TOPX,Y}(K) = |V_x| + |V_y|$$

by considering the motion vectors $MV_{TOPX,Y}(K)$ of the top half-frame of the k -th picture and

$$V_{BOTX,Y}(K) = |V_x| + |V_y|$$

by considering the motion vectors $MV_{BOTX,Y}(K)$ of the bottom half-frame of the k -th picture.

[0033] Indeed the above way of calculating the motion coefficients is only one of several possible ones: for example it would be satisfactory to calculate the motion coefficients as the square root of the sum of squares of V_x and V_y , as well as in other ways, as will appear evident to a skilled person.

[0034] By way of an example, the case wherein the motion coefficients $V_{TOPX,Y}(K)$ e $V_{BOTX,Y}(K)$ are calculated as the sum of the absolute values of the components of the motion vector MV will be described hereinbelow, though the method of the invention may be implemented even by calculating motion coefficients in a different manner.

[0035] It is possible to distinguish an interlaced picture from a progressive picture by examining the distribution of

¹ A frame of a picture is divisible in two half-frames (*fields*), commonly called *top* (or *odd*) *field* and *bottom* (or *even*) *field*, because of the position of the lines constituting the frame.

the motion coefficients of its top half-frame and of its bottom half-frame. Experimentally, it has been found that progressive pictures are characterized by notable differences in the distribution of top and bottom coefficients, while interlaced pictures are characterized by distinctly more uniform distributions of motion coefficients.

[0036] This concept is clearly shown in Figs. 3 and 4 wherein two typical hystograms of the respective distributions of motion coefficients of a top half-frame (top field) and of a bottom half-frame (bottom field), relative to progressive sequences and interlaced sequences, respectively, are depicted.

[0037] In particular, in Fig. 3 the difference between the two distributions is evident. The distribution of coefficients of the bottom field is characterized by a greater concentration (vertical axis) near the value 1 (horizontal axis), while the distribution of coefficients of the top field has a greater uniformity; on the contrary in Fig. 4 the two hystograms are almost identical.

[0038] Upon testing many different video sequences, calculating the respective distributions of motion coefficients, obtained with different motion estimators, it has been seen that:

- the distributions of motion coefficients of bottom fields belonging to frames of movie sub-sequences (film-mode) show a distinct concentration about the maximum value, near to 1, because of the vertical component of vectors. On the contrary in top fields such a maximum is distinctly lower, i.e. the dispersion is higher than in bottom fields;
- the distributions of motion coefficients of top fields and of bottom fields belonging to interlaced sequences have a substantially similar shape and the dispersion of said distributions is greater the greater is motion present.

[0039] Substantially the same significative shapes are obtained even for a single frame, besides for a whole sequence.

[0040] Substantially, an interlaced picture is substantially characterized in that the distribution of top motion coefficients is almost identical to that of bottom motion coefficients, while a progressive picture is characterized by a notable difference between distributions of top and bottom motion coefficients and by a relatively stronger clustering near the maximum value of the bottom motion coefficients than of the top motion coefficients.

[0041] The detection of one of the above mentioned characteristics is exploited for recognizing the progressive or the interlaced content of a picture.

[0042] The stochastic variables theory gives several methods for recognizing one of the above mentioned properties. Such methods may consist in calculating a pair of shape coefficients representing the distribution of the top and of the bottom motion coefficients and in verifying whether between the two shape coefficients there is a substantial difference or not: in the positive case, the two distributions are recognized as similar, otherwise as different from each other.

[0043] Alternatively it is possible to calculate a coefficient representative of the correlation of the two distributions and to verify whether such a correlation coefficient exceeds a certain value or not: in the positive case the picture is interlaced, otherwise progressive.

[0044] Yet another method may consist in using as a shape coefficient the variance in respect to the maximum value of the two distributions of motion coefficients. Given that for a progressive picture the values of motion coefficients of the bottom field are more clustered near their maximum than the values of motion coefficients a top field, the variance for the top field will be greater than the variance for the bottom field. Therefore, it may be said that if the variance of the motion coefficients of the top field exceeds by a certain percentage the variance of the motion coefficients of the bottom field, the picture is progressive, otherwise interlaced.

[0045] A particularly interesting application of the invention for performing a pre-test of the type of pictures, recognizing a picture as progressive by way of the motion coefficients is the one described hereinbelow.

[0046] Sometimes in video sequences there are pictures, called "quasi-stationary", whose motion is limited to relatively small portions of the frame: a typical quasi-stationary picture is a picture representing a TV news speaker, wherein the motion is substantially limited to the face of the speaker while the remaining portion of the picture remains substantially static.

[0047] In such a situation there is a relatively small difference between a progressive and an interlaced picture, therefore, without introducing relevant errors it is possible to classify the examined picture as convenience. Because a most important application is for video sequences coded according to the MPEG standard, the quasi-stationary pictures may be considered progressive because such a choice allows a considerable reduction of the number of calculations needed for the MPEG coding.

[0048] The recognition of pictures as "quasi-stationary" pictures is carried out by producing two sum coefficients, respectively top SV_{TOP} and bottom SV_{BOT} , as the sum of all top and bottom motion coefficients (represented by the signal B of the "quasi-stationary" block of the schemes of Fig. 6a and 6c), respectively. If both sum coefficients SV_{TOP} and SV_{BOT} are lower than respective pre-established positive numbers T1 and T2, that is:

$$SV_{TOP} < T1 \quad \text{and} \quad SV_{BOT} < T2 \quad (1)$$

then the examined picture will be recognized as a "quasi-stationary" picture.

[0049] Given the great simplification resulting from the possibility of treating pictures as "quasi-stationary" pictures, it is possible to conveniently use the above described test before any subsequent test for detecting eventually the progressive or interlaced content of a picture.

[0050] A preferred way of discriminating progressive pictures from interlaced pictures consists in defining two pre-established threshold, respectively bottom THR1 and top THR2, and comparing the top motion coefficients $V_{TOPX,Y}(K)$ and bottom motion coefficients $V_{BOTX,Y}(K)$ with these thresholds, indicating with

$$N1_{TOP}(K) = \text{number of all } MV_{TOPX,Y}(K) \text{ such that } V_{TOPX,Y}(K) < THR1$$

$$N2_{TOP}(K) = \text{number of all } MV_{TOPX,Y}(K) \text{ such that } V_{TOPX,Y}(K) > THR2 \quad (2)$$

$$N1_{BOT}(K) = \text{number of all } MV_{BOTX,Y}(K) \text{ such that } V_{BOTX,Y}(K) < THR1$$

$$N2_{BOT}(K) = \text{number of all } MV_{BOTX,Y}(K) \text{ such that } V_{BOTX,Y}(K) > THR2$$

[0051] An example of a possible functional block diagram for calculating the parameter $N1_{TOP}(K)$ of a top field is shown in Fig. 5. The architecture for calculating the other three parameters is the same.

[0052] Referring to the histograms of Figs. 3 and 4, it may be noted that $N1_{TOP}(K)$ and $N1_{BOT}(K)$ give an indication of the maximum value of the distributions (if THR1 is greater than such a maximum value), while $N2_{TOP}(K)$ and $N2_{BOT}(K)$ indicate their dispersion (width of the dome-shaped curve envelopping the histograms).

[0053] Let us define the following ratios:

$$R1(K) = N1_{TOP}(K) / N1_{BOT}(K-1)$$

$$R2(K) = N1_{BOT}(K) / N1_{TOP}(K) \quad (3)$$

$$R3(K) = N2_{TOP}(K) / N2_{BOT}(K-1)$$

$$R4(K) = N2_{BOT}(K) / N2_{TOP}(K)$$

[0054] Calling γ , δ , ϵ and η four pre-established numbers, if all the following tests verify:

$$R1(K) < \gamma$$

$$R2(K) > \delta \quad (4)$$

$$R3(K) > \epsilon$$

$$R4(K) < \eta$$

then the k -th frame is recognized as progressive, otherwise it is recognized as interlaced.

[0055] The choice of using all four parameters, instead of using only $R2(K)$ and $R4(K)$ for example, is due to the fact that because a decision must be taken for each frame, in order to minimize uncertainty it is preferable to use all available information. In order to prevent errors, it is also possible to apply the following conditions:

$$R5(K) = R2(K) / R1(K) > \theta \quad (5)$$

$$R6(K) = R3(K) / R4(K) > \tau$$

being θ and τ two pre-established positive numbers. The latter conditions impose a more distinguishable difference between the two distributions for classifying a picture as a progressive one.

[0056] An advantage of the above described procedures consists in the possibility of operating on motion vectors established for macroblocks rather than exclusively for single pixels. This permits an evident simplification of calculations that makes the method of the invention particularly appropriate even in low cost applications.

[0057] In order to avoid oscillations in the results provided by the procedure of the invention for detecting the interlaced or progressive content of the picture, that could be caused by short portions of a video sequence wherein the motion is such to make the discrimination very difficult, a simple hysteresis mechanism that considers the decisions taken in preceding frames may be introduced.

[0058] A hysteresis mechanism may be realized by associating to each picture a temporary weight value $P(K)$ depending on the recognition of the picture as a progressive or an interlaced picture, according to one of the above described methods of the invention, calculating for each processed picture a final weight value $D(K)$ as a function of its temporary weight value $P(K)$ and of the final weight values $D(I)$ relative to one or more preceding pictures; recognition of the current picture as a progressive or interlaced picture being based on its final said weight value.

[0059] An example of how such a hysteresis algorithm may be realized is shown in the flow sheet of Fig. 6a.

[0060] First of all the number of previous pictures to be considered must be decided by attributing a value to the parameter NF , for example $NF=3$. Afterwards the system applies an arbitrary technique for estimating the motion vectors and calculates the motion coefficients $V_{TOPX,Y}(K)$ and $V_{BOTX,Y}(K)$. Starting from the values of these coefficients, the block QUASI-STATIONARY verifies whether the picture is quasi-stationary or not, according to the above described algorithm.

[0061] In the positive case, the picture is classified as progressive, its final weight is established $D(K)=\omega$ and a successive picture is processed.

[0062] In the negative case, the system calculates the ratios $R1(K)$, $R2(K)$, $R3(K)$, $R4(K)$, $R5(K)$ and $R6(K)$ according to equations (3) and (5). If these ratios satisfy the inequalities (4) and (5), the block HYSTERESIS, described in more in detail in Fig. 6c, associates a temporary weight $P(K)$ to the picture. Such a temporary weight is equal to a number β if the inequalities (4) and (5) are satisfied, otherwise to a number α .

[0063] When the temporary weight is known, the block HYSTERESIS recognizes the current frame as a progressive frame if the sum of weights associated to the last two frames and to the current frame is greater than or equal to a certain number μ , i.e.:

$$P(K) + D(K-1) + D(K-2) \geq \mu$$

and the frame gets a final weight $D(K)=\beta$. In the contrary case, the current frame gets a final weight $D(K)=\omega$, is classified as interlaced.

[0064] If equations (4) and (5) are not verified (input N of the "Hysteresis" block in Figs. 6a and 6b), the current frame k is temporarily classified as interlaced and assumes the temporary weight $P(K)=\alpha$. If the complementary condition is verified:

$$P(K) + D(K-1) + D(K-2) \leq \mu$$

the final choice is interlaced frame with a final weight $D(K)=\alpha$; in the contrary case, the frame is classified as progressive and assumes the final weight $D(K)=\omega$.

[0065] According to a preferred embodiment of the invention, the weight α , β , μ and ω are equal to 0, 1, 1.5, 0.5, but these values may be changed depending on the needs, even during the same picture sequence.

[0066] With such a hysteresis procedure, the effective choice made in previous frames, by means of the weights $D(K-1)$ and $D(K-2)$, and the indication given by the various decision parameters $R1(K)$, $R2(K)$, $R3(K)$, $R4(K)$ are considered, without giving a priority to any one of the two possible choices.

[0067] A block diagram of an embodiment of the method of the invention is depicted in Fig. 7. Starting from an estimation of the motion vectors, it is verified if the current picture is quasi-stationary, then the algorithm of the invention (IPD) is executed and finally a functional block, implementing the hysteresis procedure, produce a flag indicating whether the picture is progressive or interlaced.

[0068] Using the hysteresis procedure, an abrupt change from the interlaced to the progressive scanning mode is prevented, thus avoiding that short lasting disturbances (noise) may affect the decision.

[0069] The method of the invention allows for the calculation of the motion vectors in a most refined manner, by adaptively choosing the calculation algorithm that implies the lowest number of calculations.

[0070] Given the importance assumed by the MPEG2 standard in treating sequences of digital pictures, in the following it will be made reference to a MPEG2 system, although the same considerations will be similarly applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, even in systems based on different standards.

[0071] In the MPEG2 standard², as in other standards, at least two different techniques of motion estimation and consequent temporal prediction are possible:

- **Frame Prediction**, wherein the current picture is divided in macroblocks of frame kind (16x16 pixels) and for each of them the predictor in the preceding frame is found with an arbitrary method for motion estimation.
- **Field Prediction**, wherein each macroblock frame is divided in its two component fields (16x8 pixels), one on the even half-frame and one on the odd half-frame and for each of them the predictor on the field of the same parity belonging to the temporarily preceding picture is found.

[0072] The best coding is obtained by testing all possible combinations of predictors of a macroblock: frame, field top k on field top $k-1$, field top k on field bottom $k-1$, field bottom k on field top $k-1$, field bottom k on field bottom $k-1$. In all cases, the prediction (and the motion estimation) can be of Forward or Backward kind. Therefore, a great number of matching errors need to be calculated for each macroblock.

[0073] This becomes burdensome for low cost applications: in fact interlaced sequences with little motion may be coded as progressive, without any relevant loss of quality, thus avoiding a burdening Field Prediction. Similarly, an interlaced sequence with considerable motion would not have any advantage of being predicted as a Frame, and they could satisfactorily require only a Field Prediction estimation.

[0074] It is evident the great computational simplification (from about 30% to about 50%), obtainable by carrying out only a Field or a Frame estimation. It would be necessary just a mechanism for telling to the motion estimator when to operate in Field mode and when in Frame mode. This is excellently provided by the IPD algorithm of the present invention. The only requirement is that the motion estimation be carried out on consecutive fields in one or more steps.

[0075] The first step, carried out by the block COARSE_SEARCH depicted in Fig. 8, is necessary to calculate coarse estimations of motion vectors from successive frames. The second step, carried out by the block FINE_SEARCH, is necessary to calculate a finer estimation of the motion vectors needed to the effective coding. At the end of the first step it is possible to carry out the IPD procedure of the invention, to implement a fine motion estimation in the second step.

[0076] Finally, the IPD method of the invention, when associated to a method for motion estimation, provides for alternative advantages as compared to the use of the motion estimator without any IPD modulus of the invention:

- a better quality of the predicted pictures for the same maximum number of calculated matchings per macroblock, because it is possible to increase the number of Frame only or Field only predictors (up to certain maximum number) by choosing the prediction mode depending on the indication provided by the IPD modulus;
- a lower number of matchings per macroblock for the same quality of predicted pictures, because either a Field prediction or a Frame prediction is carried out, depending on the indications provided by the IPD modulus, saving from 30% to 50% of the number of matchings, depending on the motion estimation mode.

Claims

1. A method of processing a bitstream of coded data of video sequences of progressive or interlaced pictures divisible in a top half-frame and in a bottom half-frame that comprises estimating motion vectors of groups of pixels belonging to said top half-frame of the current picture in relation to pixels belonging to the bottom half-frame of the preceding picture ($MV_{TOPX,Y}(K)$) and motion vectors of group of pixels of said bottom half-frame of the current picture in

² ISO/IEC 13818-2, Draft International Standard, May 1994.

relation to pixels belonging to the top half-frame of the current picture ($MV_{BOTX,Y}(K)$), respectively, characterized in that it comprises

calculating for each macroblock of said top half-frame and a bottom half-frame a respective top motion coefficient ($V_{TOPX,Y}(K)$) and a bottom motion coefficient ($V_{BOTX,Y}(K)$), depending on the estimation of the motion vectors of top half-frame ($MV_{TOPX,Y}(K)$) and bottom half-frame ($MV_{BOTX,Y}(K)$);
recognizing the current picture as an interlaced picture by a substantial equality of the distributions of values of said motion coefficients ($V_{TOPX,Y}(K)$, $V_{BOTX,Y}(K)$) or as a progressive picture by a substantial inequality of the distributions of values of said motion coefficients ($V_{TOPX,Y}(K)$, $V_{BOTX,Y}(K)$).

2. The method of claim 1 wherein said recognition is done by the following operations:

comparing said top motion coefficients ($V_{TOPX,Y}(K)$) and bottom motion coefficients ($V_{BOTX,Y}(K)$) with a pre-established top threshold (THR1) and a bottom threshold (THR2), respectively;
counting the number of motion vectors, whose motion coefficients are lower than said top threshold (THR1), of said top half-frames ($MV_{TOPX,Y}(K)$) and bottom half-frames ($V_{BOTX,Y}(K)$) of the current picture producing a pair of coefficients first ($N1_{TOP}(K)$) and second ($N1_{BOT}(K)$);
counting the number of motion vectors, whose motion coefficients are greater than said bottom threshold (THR2), of said top half-frames ($MV_{TOPX,Y}(K)$) and bottom half-frames ($V_{BOTX,Y}(K)$) of the current picture producing a second pair of coefficients third ($N2_{TOP}(K)$) and fourth ($N2_{BOT}(K)$);
recognizing the current picture as progressive or interlaced picture depending on said coefficients first ($N1_{TOP}(K)$), second ($N1_{BOT}(K)$), third ($N2_{TOP}(K)$) and fourth ($N2_{BOT}(K)$) relative to the current picture and to preceding pictures.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein the calculated values of said top and bottom motion coefficients are used to carry out a preliminary test consisting in

summing the motion coefficients of macroblocks belonging to the top half-frame of the current picture producing a top sum coefficient ($SV_{TOP}(K)$);
summing the motion coefficients of macroblocks belonging to the bottom half-frame of the current picture producing a bottom sum coefficient ($SV_{BOT}(K)$);
defining the current picture as a progressive picture if said top sum coefficient ($SV_{TOP}(K)$) and bottom sum coefficient ($SV_{BOT}(K)$) are lower than respective pre-established positive numbers first (T1) and second (T2), otherwise proceeding with the sequence of operations of claim 2.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein said recognition is carried out by

calculating a pair of shape coefficients first and second representing distributions of said top and bottom motion coefficients, respectively;
recognizing the current picture as a progressive picture or as an interlaced picture whether said shape coefficients differ by a quantity greater or lower than a certain value, respectively.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein said recognition is carried out by

calculating a coefficient representing the stochastic correlation between distribution of said top and bottom motion coefficients,
recognizing the current picture as an interlaced picture or as a progressive picture whether said calculated coefficient exceeds a certain value or not.

6. The method of claims 2 or 3 characterized in that it comprises

calculating a first ratio ($R1(K)$) between said first coefficient relative to the current picture ($N1_{TOP}(K)$) and the second coefficient relative to a preceding picture ($N1_{BOT}(K-1)$);
calculating a second ratio ($R2(K)$) between said second coefficient relative to the current picture ($N1_{BOT}(K)$) and said first coefficient relative to the current picture ($N1_{TOP}(K)$);
calculating a third ratio ($R3(K)$) between said third coefficient relative to the current picture ($N3_{TOP}(K)$) and the fourth coefficient relative to a preceding picture ($N2_{BOT}(K-1)$);
calculating a fourth ratio ($R4(K)$) between said fourth coefficient relative to the current picture ($N2_{BOT}(K)$) and

said third coefficient relative to the current picture ($N2_{TOP}(K)$);
 comparing said ratios first ($R1(K)$), second ($R2(K)$), third ($R3(K)$) and fourth ($R4(K)$) with respective pre-established positive numbers third (γ), fourth (δ), fifth (ϵ) and sixth (η) recognizing the current picture as a progressive picture if said ratios first ($R1(K)$) and fourth ($R4(K)$) are lower than said numbers third (γ) and sixth (η), respectively, and if simultaneously said ratios second ($R2(K)$) and third ($R3(K)$) are greater than said numbers fourth (δ) and fifth (ϵ), respectively.

7. The method of claim 6 characterized in that it comprises

dividing said ratios second ($R2(K)$) and first ($R1(K)$) between them producing a fifth ratio ($R5(K)$);
 dividing said ratios third ($R3(K)$) and fourth ($R4(K)$) between them producing a sixth ratio ($R6(K)$);
 recognizing the current picture as a progressive picture if requirements of the method of claim 6 are satisfied and if simultaneously said ratios fifth ($R5(K)$) and sixth ($R6(K)$) are greater than pre-established numbers seventh (θ) and eighth (τ).

8. The method according to one of the preceding claims characterized in that it comprises

for each elaborated picture, calculating a temporary weight value ($P(K)$) as a function of the result of the recognition of the current picture as a progressive or interlaced picture carried out according to one of the methods of the preceding claims;
 for each elaborated picture, calculating a final weight value ($D(K)$) as a function of said temporary weight value relative to the current picture ($P(K)$) and of final weight values relative to preceding pictures ($D(I)$);
 recognizing the current picture as a progressive or an interlaced picture depending on said temporary weight value relative to the current picture ($P(K)$) and on said final weight values relative to preceding pictures ($D(I)$).

9. The method of claim 1 comprising the calculation of motion vectors of a picture of a video sequence by calculating said motion vectors by a Frame-Prediction technique if the current picture is recognized as a progressive picture or by a Field-Prediction technique if the current picture is recognized as an interlaced picture.

FIG. 1

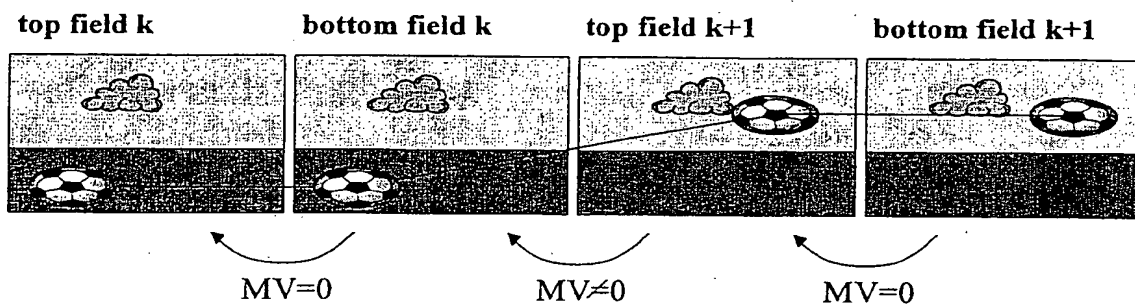


FIG. 2

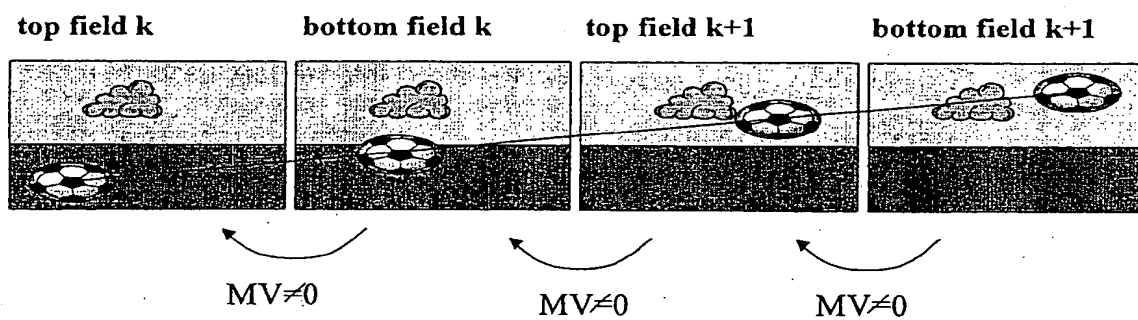


FIG. 3

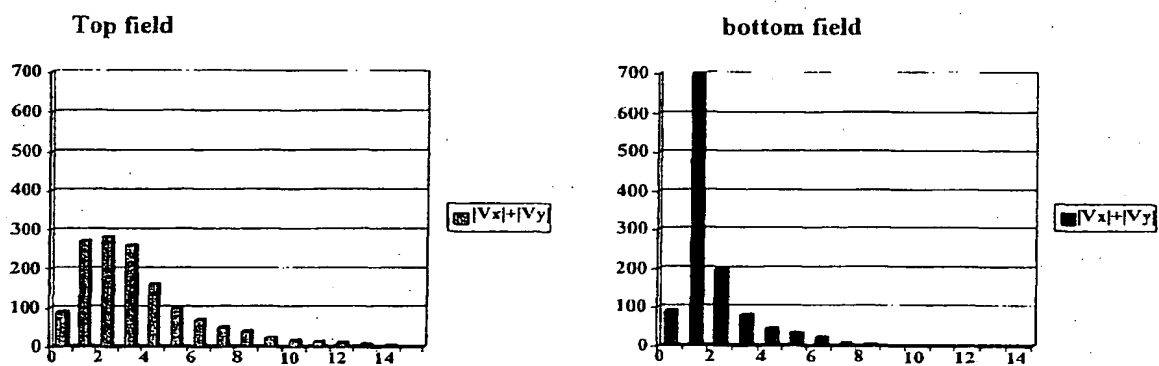


FIG. 4

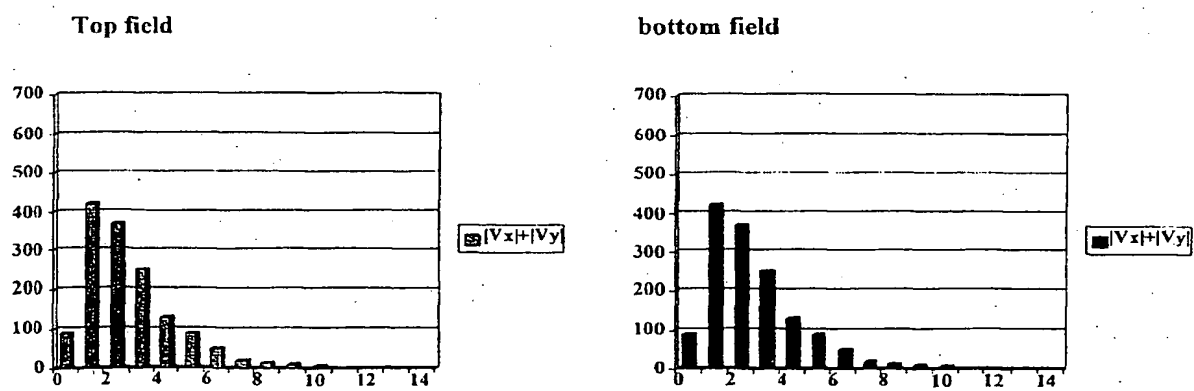


FIG. 5

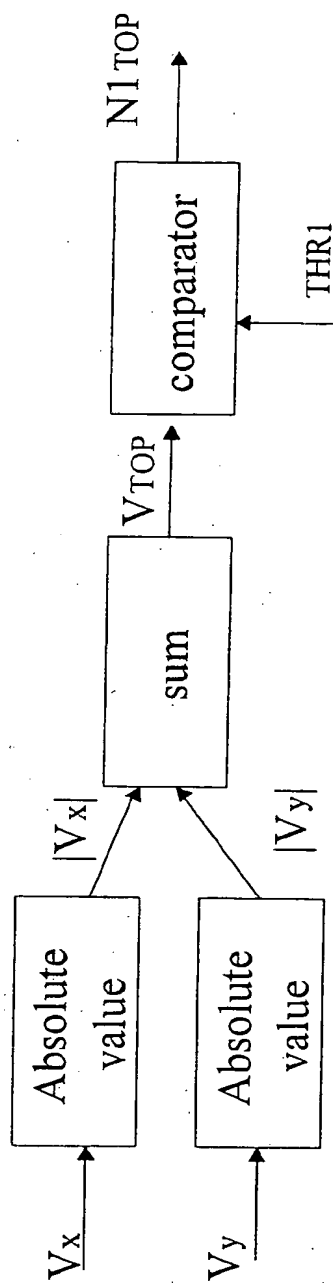


FIG 6a

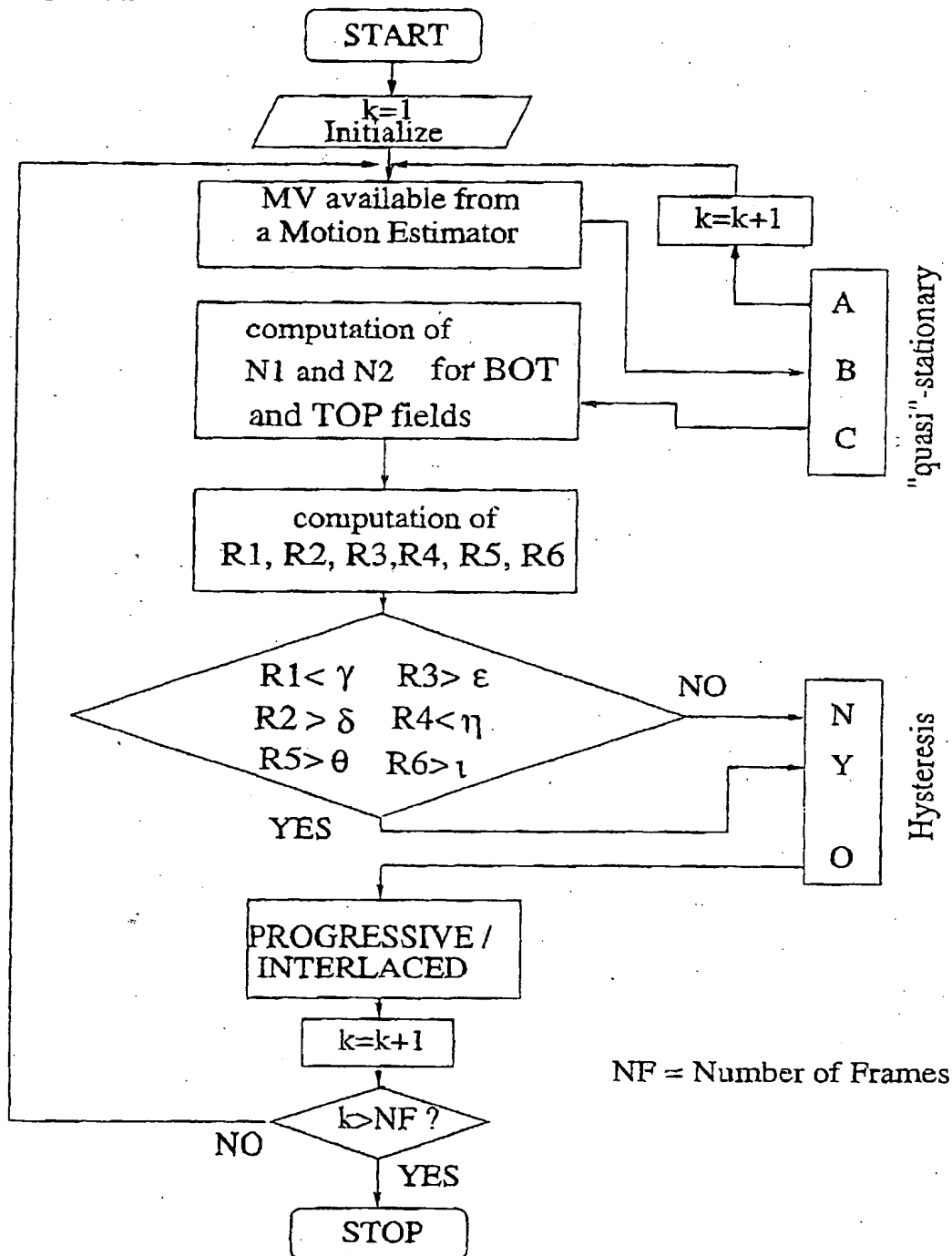


FIG 6b

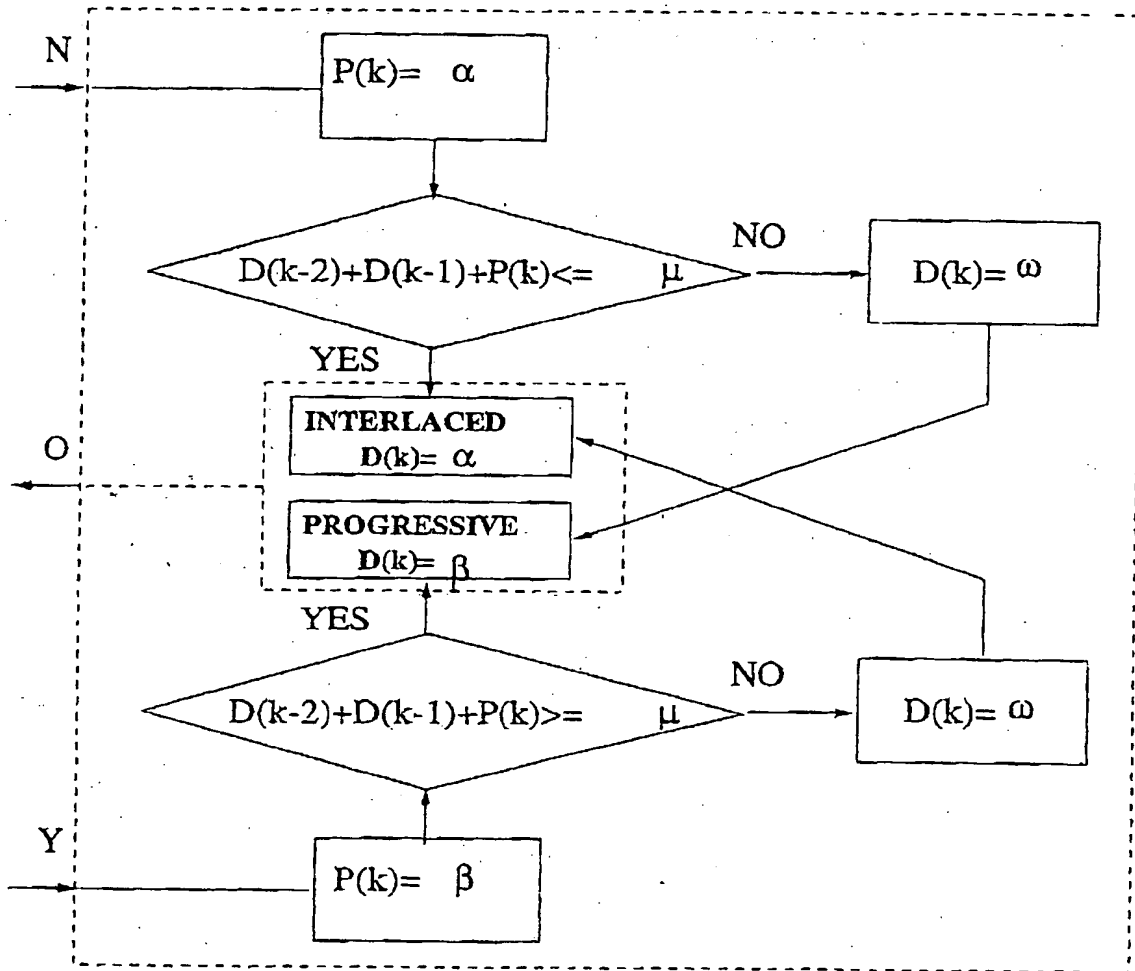


FIG 6c

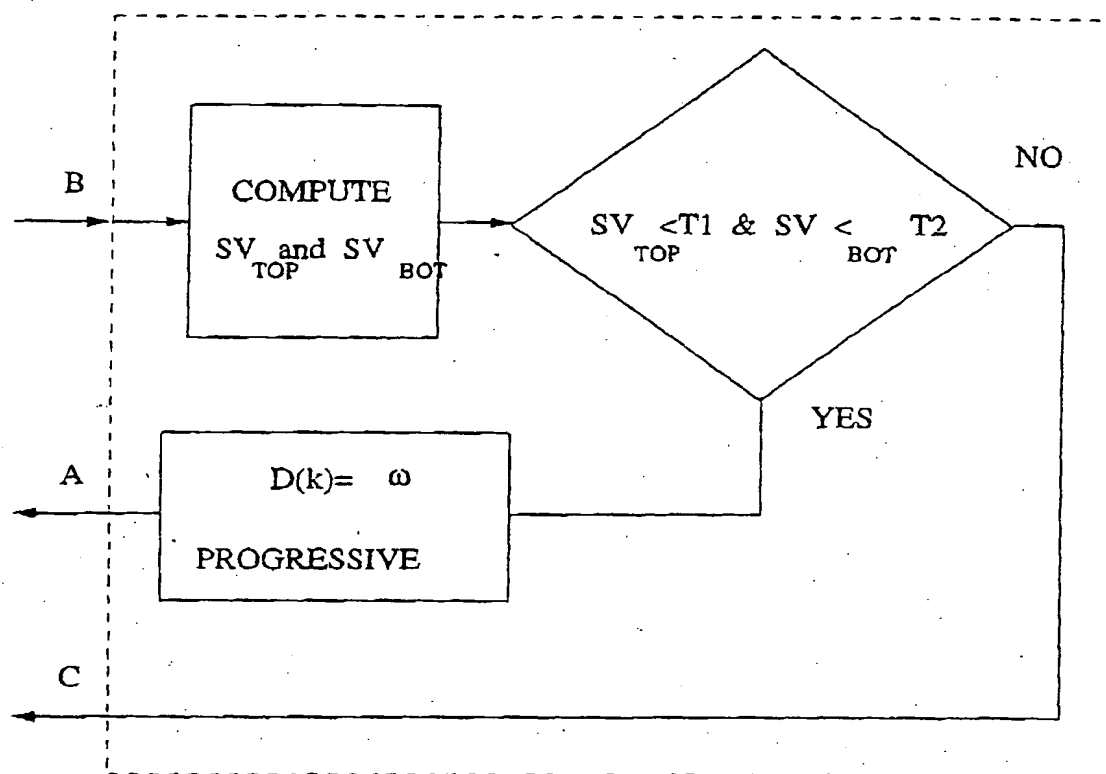


FIG. 7

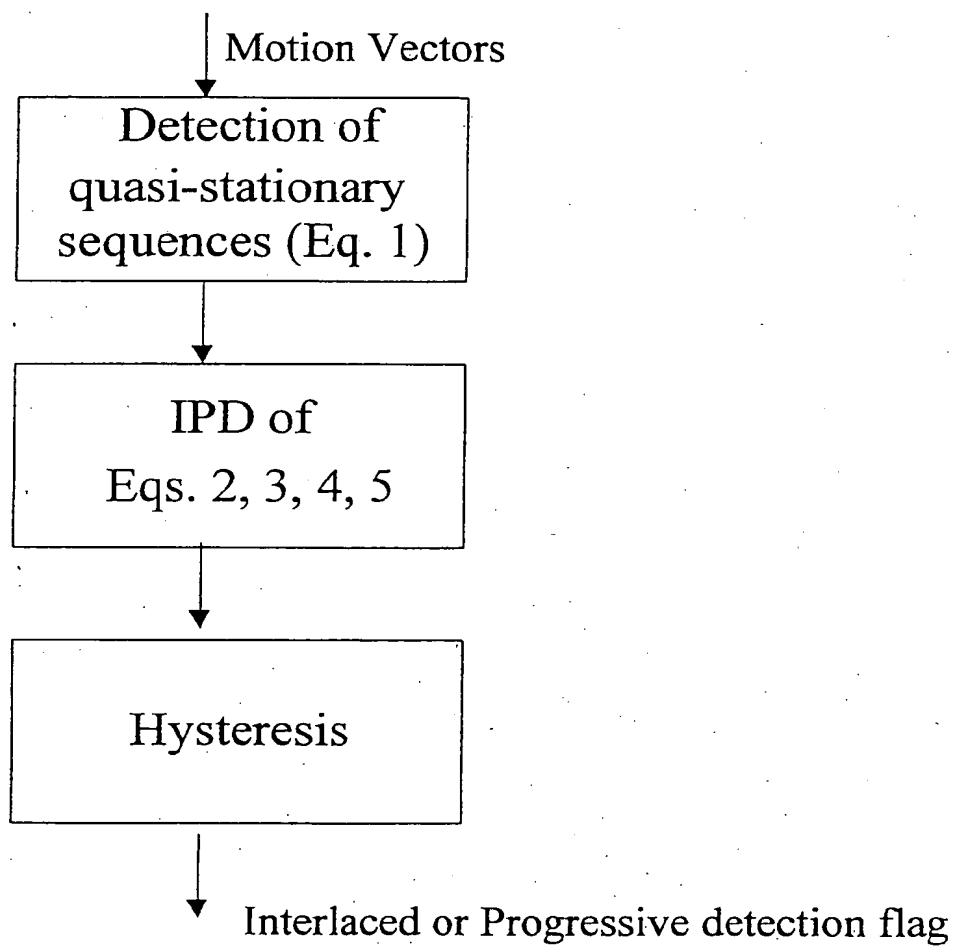
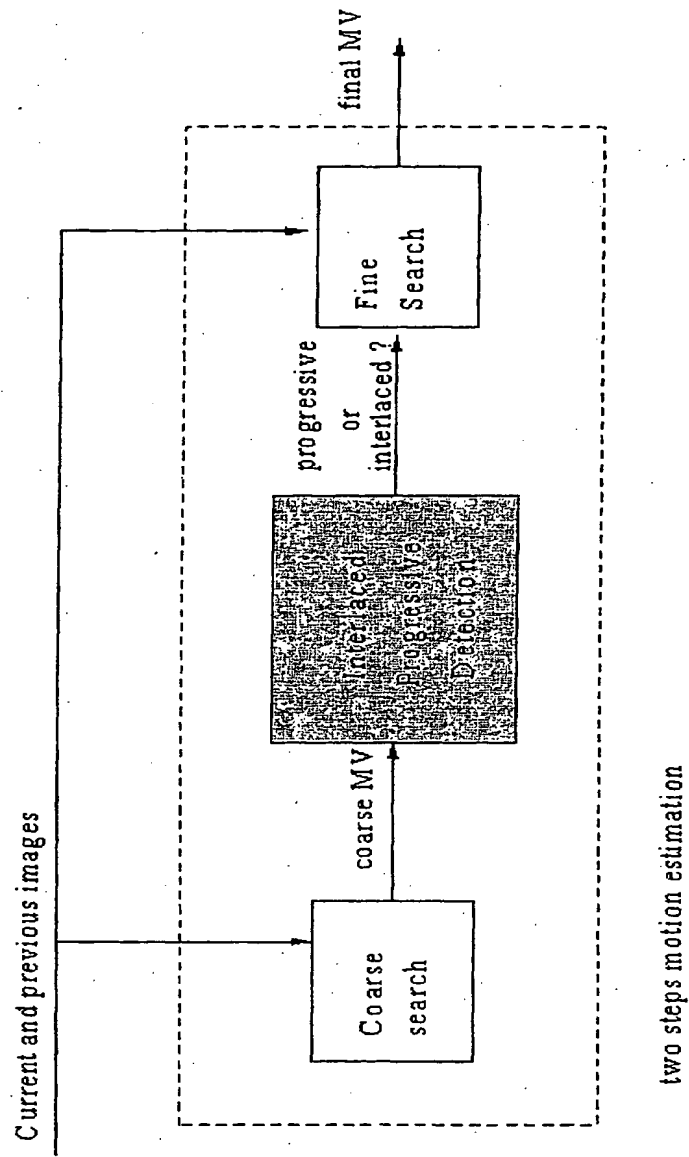


FIG. 8





European Patent
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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 99 83 0751

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